

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims replaces all prior versions and listings of claims in the application.

Listing of Claims

1.-51. (Cancelled)

52. (New) A ready-to-use water dispersible pigment composition that contains in at least 5% by weight of water, the composition comprising a dispersion of a water-insoluble hydrophilic natural pigment in the form of bodies of an average size which is at the most 10 µm, said bodies being dispersed in the absence of a surface active substance in an aqueous phase comprising a hydrocolloid, wherein the composition, when it is added to a food product comprising multiple, separated compartments, whereby the composition is dispersed in one or more selected compartments, essentially does not migrate into other compartments from said compartment(s) where it is dispersed.

53. (New) A composition according to claim 52, wherein said water-insoluble hydrophilic natural pigment is a pigment that is generally insoluble in aqueous media at about neutral pH or below but is soluble in aqueous media at pH values in the alkaline range.

54. (New) A composition according to claim 53, wherein said water-insoluble hydrophilic natural pigment is selected from the group consisting of a porphyrin pigment, carmine, curcumin and a carotenoid.

55. (New) A composition according to claim 54, wherein said water-insoluble hydrophilic natural pigment is in the form of particles obtained by precipitation of the pigment caused by acidifying an alkaline solution of the pigment.

56. (New) A composition according to claim 52, wherein said hydrocolloid is selected from the group consisting of a protein, a polysaccharide and a gum.

57. (New) A composition according to claim 52, wherein the composition has a pH which is at the most 7.

58. (New) A composition according to claim 52, wherein said composition is an edible food product.

59. (New) A method according to claim 52, which further comprises drying the dispersion to obtain a composition containing less than 5% by weight of water, subject to the proviso that, when said pigment is carmine or is spray-dried norbixin, then the hydrocolloid is not gelatin.

60. (New) A method according to claim 52, wherein said water-insoluble, hydrophilic natural pigment is in the form of particles obtained by precipitation of the pigment caused by acidifying an alkaline solution of the pigment.

61. (New) A method according to claim 52, wherein the hydrocolloid is present in an amount of less than about 10% by weight calculated on the pigment.

62. (New) A method according to claim 52, further comprising adding a carbohydrate to said aqueous phase.

63. (New) A method of preparing a ready-to-use, water dispersible pigment composition, said method comprising the steps of:

- i) preparing an alkaline aqueous solution comprising a water-insoluble, hydrophilic natural pigment,
- ii) preparing an aqueous composition of a hydrocolloid, and
- iii) mixing the alkaline aqueous solution with the aqueous hydrocolloid composition to obtain the composition comprising the pigment in the form of a dispersion of pigment bodies having an average size of at the most 10 µm, the composition containing at least 5% by weight water.

64. (New) A method according to claim 63, further comprising adjusting the pH to a level which causes the pigment to precipitate.

65. (New) A method according to claim 63, further comprising drying the composition of pigment bodies to obtain a composition containing less than 5% by weight of water, subject to the proviso that, when the pigment is carmine or spray-dried norbixin, then the hydrocolloid is not gelatin.

66. (New) A method according to claim 63, wherein the aqueous solution of step i) and/or the hydrocolloid composition of step ii) further comprises a carbohydrate.

67. (New) A method of preparing a ready-to-use, water-dispersible pigment composition comprising:

- i) preparing an alkaline aqueous solution comprising a water-insoluble, hydrophilic natural pigment,
- ii) decreasing the pH to precipitate said water-insoluble, hydrophilic natural pigment, resulting in a dispersion of precipitated pigment,
- iii) preparing an aqueous dispersion or solution of a hydrocolloid,
- iv) mixing the dispersion comprising the precipitated pigment of step i) and the hydrocolloid containing dispersion or solution of step ii),

to obtain the composition comprising the pigment in the form of a dispersion of pigment bodies having an average size of at the most 10 µm, wherein the composition containing at least 5% by weight water.

68. (New) A method according to claim 67, further comprising drying the composition of pigment bodies to obtain a composition containing less than 5% by weight of water, subject to the limitation that, when the pigment is carmine or spray-dried norbixin, the hydrocolloid is not gelatin.

69. (New) A method according to claim 67, wherein the dispersion comprising the precipitated pigment of step i) and the dispersion or solution of step ii) further comprises a carbohydrate.